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DRAMA

A MONTHLY RECORD OF THE THEATRE
IN TOWN AND COUNTRY
AT HOME & ABROAD



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DRAMA

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THE JOURNAL OF THE BRITISH DRAMA LEAGUE

PLAYS OF THE MONTH

By Ivor Brown.

IT often happens that a dramatist succeeds most with work which pleases him least. It is possible that a man of Mr. James Bridie's mental activity may think that adapting Bruno Frank's "Sturm in Wasserglass" is one of the spare-time and minor occupations of a self-respecting dramatist. However, "Storm in a Tea-cup," produced at the Royalty and quickly transferred to the Haymarket, is the kind of comedy which may serve his pocket very well, even though such a victory be less than gratifying to his self-esteem. It is in fact, as adapted to Scottish life, a nice, gay story of a pompous and place-hunting Provost tripped in his career by some local rumpus over a mongrel dog belonging to a chattering Irish woman. The moral is that in Britain you must never take sides against a dumb animal and in Scotland you must never take sides against the Irish, who will soon be the majority of Scottish voters, at least in the South West. Another conclusion is that a combination of Scottish and Irish acting in a near-farcical comedy is exactly what the English order. But the success of the piece will owe a great deal to an Englishman; Mr. Roger Livesey, as a dog-befriending journalist in the thick of the fight, is what every woman knows to be a darling, while Patsy the dog, in a most life-like performance, is, like his owner, Miss Sara Allgood, just darrlin, as Joxer Daly would have said.

Dogs were in the news last month. "The Dog Beneath the Skin," by Mr. W. H. Auden and Mr. Christopher Isherwood, proved, I believe, to be the most popular of the Group Theatre's productions at the Westminster.

The dog in this case is first cousin to the pantomime cat; he directs his bark and bite to the shins of capitalism. The bark is represented by a series of swinging verses delivered from the side of the stage; the bite consists of charade-like sketches revealing a quest through a lunatic world. The piece has been very highly praised, a valuation which I do not share but gladly record. It must be nice for the actors of the Group Theatre who certainly have not failed in experimental energy, to have enlarged and gratified their special public.

The directors of the Embassy Theatre must be somewhat embarrassed by the never-failing popularity of corpse-and-clue plays. "No Exit" by George Goodchild and Frank Witty, turned out to be another of their successes in this kind and was successfully piloted by Mr. Robert Douglas to the St. Martins. Mr. Michael Egan, author of "The Dominant Sex" tried with "Private Company" to encourage the Embassy audience to enjoy a play in which not a shot is fired, no funeral note is heard, and no gentleman in plain clothes arrives to ask complicated questions. The tale is of business premises, where the course of true love runs up and down stairs, between 'M.G.' Publicity and Standard Products, with a speed that is rather hard to credit. It also runs into flats and homes, but not so persuasively as to make one foresee another year-long run for Mr. Egan. But it was a great relief to have a change from crime and punishment; Mr. Egan's wit and the dialogue, in which he expresses it have both a pleasant turn.

"Follow the Sun," Mr. Cochran's 1936 Revue, at the Adelphi, was an organiser's battle

PLAYS OF THE MONTH

in which Mr. Cochran himself, Herr Ernst Stern, Mr. Frank Collins and all the stage staff scored victories over space and time in their pursuit of lustre and loveliness. There were the ferocities of Cuban dancing, the charms of Mozartian salon and of Polonaise, and the humours of Mr. Sitwell's Edwardian ballet. Critical opinion of the libretto was not very kind. The sketches seemed to me as good as most, but naturally it is hard work for wit to make its voice powerfully heard and its smile effectively seen amid the thunders and splendours of a cosmic cavalcade.

Postponements due to the Royal funeral caused some clashing of dates when the time came to start again. So I missed the 'Old Vic's' production of "St. Helena" by Jeanne de Casalis and R. C. Sherriff. Reports were nearly all favourable and a reading of the text

suggested that the considerable difficulty of getting variety into the naturally monotonous and melancholy subject of the caged eagle moulting to decay had been cleverly overcome. Mr. Kenneth Kent has been doing very good work at the 'Old Vic' this year and played the big part on merit.

"Out of the Dark" at the Ambassadors is an interesting play on the subject of blindness. Could one blind from birth be so happy with his own dream of reality that the visible actuality, which he discovers when cured, disgusts and horrifies him beyond endurance and even makes him crave for his old night instead of such a day? Mr. Ingram D'Abbes has handled his difficult subject with considerable success and Mr. Henry Oscar and Messrs. Gwen Ffrangcon Davies give his piece a really sensitive interpretation.

THE AESTHETIC USE OF THE STANDARD SET

By Francis Baker-Smith.

TO avoid misunderstanding, it may be as well to admit from the start that there is nothing essentially new in the idea of an 'interchangeable' set or a 'unit' set. Such sets have been frequently devised and used by many experimental theatres both in England and on the Continent during the years since the War. At the Festival Theatre, Cambridge, in the middle 'Twenties, Mr. Terence Gray was employing to great advantage an ingenious unit set consisting of a series of simple columns, blocks and steps which, with the aid of modern lighting equipment, could be used to suggest a tremendous variety of scenes and atmospheres.

Similarly, many types of interchangeable sets have been devised whereby a large variety of scenes may be suggested by altering the relative positions of various sections of the set.

The type of set, however, with which I am here concerned should be of particular interest to those who are aiming, not so much at experiment for experiment's sake, nor oddity for oddity's sake, but rather at a sound and economical method of getting greater variety out

of a small stock of scenery. I have called this type of set, for reasons that will be seen later, an 'interchangeable-unit' set, and its chief merit lies in the fact that it is the outcome of considerable experience in designing sets for repertories and getting them built, painted and set up in under a week. It has been evolved rather than deliberately devised.

It will be clearly seen that the main obstacle in the path of companies or dramatic societies who are frequently putting on short runs of different plays, is one of sets. The same company of actors can be used repeatedly; so can the same producer and stage-manager. But if one has any conscience at all over the look of things, one cannot go on using the same 'oak-chamber' set and the same 'garden' cloth indefinitely if one wants to avoid boring or even nauseating an audience. Yet what are the practical alternatives for such companies who are not heavily subsidised? Building new sets for each production is generally quite out of the question. The chances of being able to buy up a set which was used for

THE ÆSTHETIC USE OF THE STANDARD SET

the same play by another company are small; and even if the wherewithal were forthcoming, it is unlikely that the set would either fit on to another stage or be easily adaptable to it. Moreover, such a set would not as a rule be easily convertible for use in another play without a considerable amount of structural alteration—a process almost synonymous with heavy cost.

There remains now only one alternative, and to this countless amateur societies are forced to resort—namely, hiring. On the whole this is unsatisfactory, as secretaries of such societies know full well. It is too much to expect that, in a store of miscellaneous scenery which has been bought up cheaply from moribund touring companies or defunct pantomimes, one will be able to lay one's hands on exactly what is necessary, practically, economically and æsthetically, for one's own production. In fact, one never does; and the result is that what might have been a polished production with tone and quality is marred and rendered commonplace by reason of its tawdry and muddle-headed background.

A system of hiring is obviously necessary, for most amateur societies have no means of storing scenery between productions. They must be able to hire settings which have been specially designed for their particular production, but at a figure that is at any rate no higher than they would pay to a scenic store for second-hand equipment. This, on the face of it, may appear to be a utopian dream, and yet it not only can be done, but is being done by means of the 'interchangeable-unit' system. Moreover, the system makes it possible for such societies as have a theatre and storing-space of their own to buy units and sections of scenery which are easily convertible for almost any production they are likely to stage, without rebuilding.

It is worked in this manner. All flats, whether plain or with openings, are of standard sizes up to six feet in width and eighteen feet in height; openings for doors, windows, fireplaces, recesses and so on are also of standard sizes, but of certain definite proportions which have been found to produce the widest possible range of convertibility. For these openings a large variety of standard 'fixtures' have been designed, by which are meant doors, windows, etcetera, which are attached to the flats either by cleating or with hooks, but remain easily removeable. But the converti-

bility of a standard flat does not end here, for within the standard fixtures are removeable and interchangeable sections, such as panels of doors, lights of windows and elements of fireplaces, which can be removed and substituted quickly and without trouble.

Therefore, in a given set of standard flats, we can, without structural rebuilding of any kind, achieve enormous variety by merely altering our ground plan, our fixtures and the removeable sections of those fixtures. In addition to all the variations thus obtainable, we can repaint both flats and fixtures in whatever scheme we choose. It may occur to the reader that, after all is said and done, the results must all have a certain sameness of effect inasmuch as the sizes of the openings and fixtures are unchanged. But it must be remembered that the effect of size in anything is almost entirely a matter of proportion. This is particularly true in architectural matters, for with a careful use of the laws of proportion a door of, let us say, six feet by two feet can be made to look almost any relative width or height and even any size within reason.

Proportion, let it be admitted, is the pivot upon which the successful use of the 'interchangeable-unit' set depends, and without which it is nothing more than an ingenious 'gadget'; and I cannot here undertake to give a concise recipe for designing a well-proportioned set. It requires about ten years study to learn the rudiments of the subject and would probably take several times as long to explain it in writing. Suffice it to say that the *actual* size of an object has nothing to do with its *apparent* size, if its component parts are designed with an understanding of proportion and an experience of obtaining effects on a stage. An illustration of this is the widely remarked phenomenon that short people almost invariably look taller on a stage than in real life. That the theatre from beginning to end is a fabric of illusion, a vast structure of unrealities, is equally true of its scenic side as of its acting; and just as it is the actor's business to exploit this illusion to gain his effects, so also it is the duty of the designer to analyse and exploit the unreal conditions under which he is working. An actor is not denounced as a fake because he weeps for a loss which he has not personally sustained; and if a designer makes a window look taller without actually changing its size, he is only fulfilling his function, which is to assist in creating an effect.

THE ÆSTHETIC USE OF THE STANDARD SET

Economy is perhaps the most outstanding characteristic of modern stage design, and an effect achieved by æsthetic economy and restraint is generally more successful than a laboured and redundant one. But what is badly needed, especially in the amateur theatre, is an economy in design which goes hand-in-hand with an economy of materials and cost. In this respect

the value of the 'interchangeable-unit' set can hardly be over-estimated, for it employs every foot of wood and canvas to its fullest possible extent, gives tremendous scope for ingenuity in planning, painting and general re-arrangement of its units, and cuts down expenditure to a minimum without interfering with the ultimate æsthetic effect.

THE CAMBRIDGE ARTS THEATRE

By Professor E. J. Dent

THE opening of the new Arts Theatre at Cambridge on February 3rd was an event which it is to be hoped will mark the beginning of a new era in the history of drama at Cambridge. During the last twenty years there has been an extraordinary development of dramatic activity in Cambridge as far as amateur productions were concerned, but the professional theatre has passed through a gradual decline. Forty years ago the New Theatre was opened by Sir Herbert Beerbohm Tree, and for many years it maintained a reasonably high level; but after the war the management was unable to cope adequately with new conditions, and the building has become a cinema, except for the occasional productions of the Greek Play Committee, the Town Operatic Society and a few other bodies. The history of the Festival Theatre needs no recapitulation here; since Mr. Terence Gray gave it up various managers have carried on a brave struggle to maintain a stock company there, but the results have hardly been encouraging.

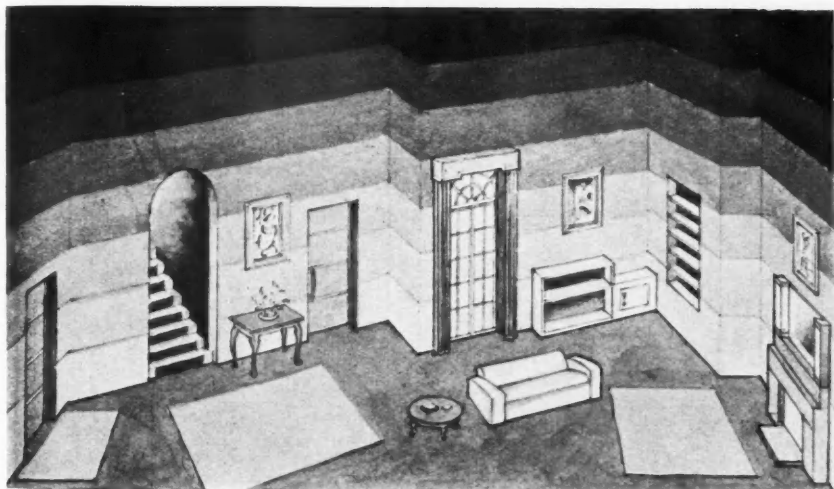
The main drawback of the Festival is its distance from the centre of Cambridge. The Arts Theatre starts its career with every advantage. The site, behind King's Parade and fronting on Peas Hill, belongs to King's College; it was formerly occupied by shops and miscellaneous buildings not in very good repair. The College decided to rebuild the frontage to Peas Hill with shops on the ground floor and a hostel for undergraduates above.

At the back of these, enclosed by houses all round, there remained a considerable space which could not be utilized for any sort of building that required normal lighting. Mr. J. M.

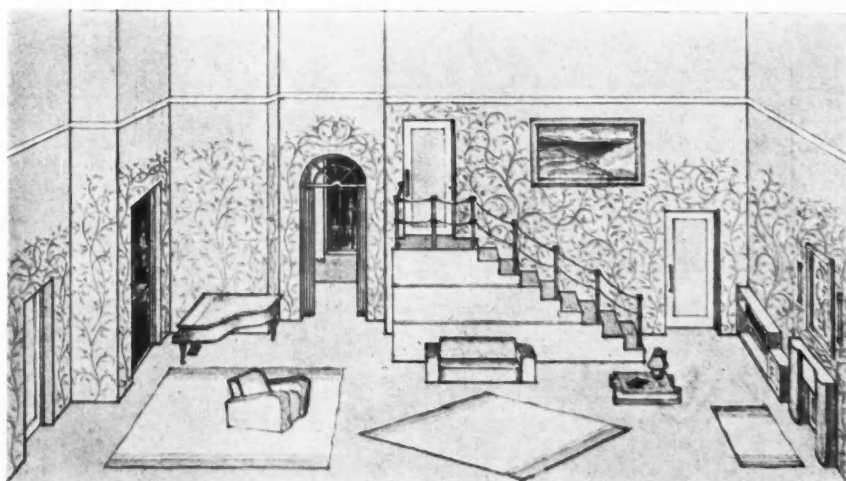
Keynes saw that it might be possible to erect a theatre there, and hopes were even entertained that the College itself might undertake the building of it; but eventually the College granted a lease to a company formed by Mr. Keynes, and the building of the theatre was entrusted to Messrs. Kennedy and Nightingale. The architects are indeed to be congratulated on the success with which they have treated a site of peculiar difficulty.

The auditorium is panelled in birch three-ply and is designed on the basis of a pentagon; the pentagon has in fact been adopted as the emblem of the theatre. There are stalls and a circle, but no gallery above; the theatre seats 600 and every seat is both comfortable and has a good view of the stage. Persons with long legs will be grateful for the amount of space between the rows, a matter to which the architects paid particular attention. The stage is comparatively small, and when the Vic-Wells ballet danced on it for the opening night, it was evident that they felt a little restricted; but for ordinary purposes it is sufficient, and it is well proportioned. Space has also been provided for an adequate orchestra part of which is under the stage. It may be said at once that the acoustics of the theatre are perfect, thanks to the skilled advice of Mr. Hope Bagenal; the Vic-Wells orchestra under Mr. Constant Lambert sounded full and brilliant, without ever being overpowering, and Mr. Keynes's speech to the audience was heard without the slightest difficulty.

In connection with the theatre there is a bar and café on the top floor, and on the first floor, over Mr. David's bookshop, there is a capacious restaurant in which clients are promised the choicest Italian cookery.



SET OF INTERCHANGEABLE-UNIT FLATS
ARRANGED AND PAINTED FOR "BIOGRAPHY."



THE SAME SET OF FLATS RE-ARRANGED
AND RE-PAINTED FOR "WORSE THINGS
HAPPEN AT SEA." DESIGNED BY FRANCIS
BAKER-SMITH.



Pollard Crotcher, Photo

SCENE FROM THE 1936 REVUE
AT THE GATE THEATRE, LONDON.
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THE CAMBRIDGE ARTS THEATRE

The directors of the theatre are Mr. J. M. Keynes, Miss J. M. Harvey and Mr. G. H. W. Rylands, whose names are a guarantee of the high standard of entertainment which it is intended to provide. According to their own programme the first object of the theatre is to provide a home for the dramatic and musical productions of Cambridge itself. Hitherto the A.D.C. theatre has been almost the only place for such activities, and for many of these it is too small; the A.D.C. theatre is practically impossible for musical performances. The dramatic energies of Cambridge have in recent years multiplied considerably; we have not only English plays of all kinds, but Greek plays, French plays (the French Society is notably active), German and Spanish plays too, to say nothing of operas and dramatized oratorios. The Arts Theatre also intends to produce plays professionally on its own, and a fortnight of Ibsen is their first experiment, with Lydia Lopokova in principal parts. It is hoped further that London casts will be available from time to time, and also productions by the leading provincial repertory theatres, as well as by international touring companies. For Sunday evenings concerts and lectures are being arranged. Even as a concert hall only the theatre would be a welcome acquisition to Cambridge, in view of the rebuilding of the Guildhall.

The Arts Theatre will also be used for films, under the management of Mr. Openshaw Higgins, which means that a higher artistic standard will be maintained than is the case in most cinemas.

The Arts Theatre in fact stands for all those ideals which the British Drama League was created to uphold—to raise the drama in this country to a level above that which the purely commercial theatre can ever achieve. If this is to be done—and the Drama League has shown that such ideals can be systematically pursued—it is only right that the Universities should take a leading part in the movement. The Cambridge Arts Theatre will not be a University Theatre in the strict sense, but its policy will always be directed by University people who are conscious of their call to be sources of inspiration to the cultural life of the community.

BARRIE IN CHINA

By S. I. Hsiung

BARRIE is not so popular in China as Shaw, and probably will never be. There are even a great number of people who have never heard of him, but it is impossible to have never heard of Shaw. For Shaw, some may like and some may dislike him, but for Barrie, everyone who knows his work cannot but admire him. In China he is not considered as a boy who would not grow up and always playing hide-and-seek with angels. You may be surprised to hear this, but he is taken seriously. Some of his plays were discussed in the same breath with Ibsen's "A Doll's House" and "Ghosts." When I first translated his "Admirable Crichton" for our public, some took him to be a Radical and one critic said he was a follower of J. J. Rousseau. Naturally, those who have been to England and have witnessed a performance of "Peter Pan" and were influenced by the innocent children-audience and their angelic mothers, thought they knew better. They admired Barrie for his whimsical childishness and would not allow any socialistic rubbish to profane his purity. When later on I translated his "Peter Pan," the controversy was even greater. Some intellectual critic pointed out to the public that the little ironies in this innocent fantasy were serious problems which students of Socialism ought to take into careful consideration!

The young intellectuals hailed the play "Dear Brutus" as a masterpiece of philosophy. One of our ancient philosophers said: "To live is like to dream." Chwang Tze, who lived two thousand years ago, once dreamt that he was a butterfly, but when he woke up he wondered whether he was really a butterfly dreaming that he was a man! So we consider our life as a dream, and to live again in the magic wood of "Dear Brutus" is to dream for the second time. With the success of "Dear Brutus" in China, Barrie can never pose as a child. His "The Twelve-Pound Look" was considered a shorter edition of "A Doll's House," and his "Half an Hour" gave the highbrows many dreadful hours of serious discussion. Even his "Quality Street," "What Every Woman Knows," and "Alice Sit-by-the-Fire" were classified as problem plays.

We are informed that an International Theatre Conference is to be held in Vienna at the beginning of September.

BARRIE IN CHINA

We never dreamed that in England, his native country—the fact that he was born in Scotland doesn't matter to us—his plays were not now consistently performed.

When I went to Scotland last year I was told that he was more appreciated by his country-men there. Of course every Scotsman knows the name James Matthew Barrie and at least professes to know his plays very well. The first question which they unanimously put to me was: "How did you translate the Scottish dialect in his plays?" And I had to inform them that of the twenty published plays, only two have a little touch of Scots in them. In "What Every Woman Knows," the spellings of the words spoken by Scottish characters are all English; and in "Mary Rose" a few words spoken by Cameron are slightly differently spelt. Very few people realise that "The Little Minister" is not originally a play but a novel, and has never been published as a play. Had it been pub-

lished, I don't think I could possibly translate it into Chinese. That explains, I think, why I did not translate his novels. Some of his earlier works are written in plain English, but to omit "Sentimental Tommy" and all those works of his which are the chief features of the Kailyard School would be hardly fair to him. As a novelist, which part of his work I am not so interested in, he has made prominent use of his Scottish dialect, and that his translator must not neglect.

The rumour that he has been writing a play for Miss Elizabeth Bergner is now known to be justified. It is difficult to tell how the public will receive the work of a favourite playwright after a lapse of more than ten years. However, anything from the pen which created "Peter Pan" and "The Admirable Crichton" will cause a sensation among Chinese literary circles. Whether it will be considered as whimsically childish or ironically socialistic, his Chinese admirers will have a busy time.

MUST WE BE SO PRECIOUS?

By Felicity Keith

WE meet twice a month in a disused grain warehouse; once to see a three-act play, which has a run of four nights, the next time to drink coffee and dissect the play and the players. The theatre itself is on the second floor, and holds about fifty people; the stage is reached by means of a perpendicular ladder, difficult to negotiate, as least in period costume.

The audience here, as in almost any little theatre, may roughly be divided into two main groups; the first of those who dislike the plays and say so; the second of those who dislike the plays and keep silent. These latter form the large majority; they have read between the lines of the Society's Aims and Rules and know that we are there not solely to enjoy ourselves, but to be uplifted. Not for us the fun of the 'ordinary' amateur society, which consists largely in going to see Mary and Fred play the love scene, and in speculating as to whether they really feel like that (after all these rehearsals) and, if so, whether anything will happen? We are different. All passion is spent; our senses want no

fillip; food for the mind is all we need. Shall we play Shakespeare? Better be done in modern dress, then; that will give the members something to think about.

Divided between the two main groups are the various smaller coteries; the inevitable clutter of Communists; the blank-verse enthusiasts; the Tchekhov-Ibsen school. The first-named are easily distinguishable from the solid ranks of the bourgeoisie, and for two reasons. They sit together, always in the same corner, holding a study-circle during the interval, from which the words 'masses,' 'proletariat' 'capitalistic drama' occasionally float to our uncomprehending ears. And again, on the rare occasions when we sing the National Anthem (a bourgeois gesture we do not make very often), they remain in their seats, making a pretence of searching for hats, gloves or handbags under them. It is they who are responsible for our excursions into ex—or impressionistic drama; for plays presented either entirely in the dark or with one beam of blue light falling on a face behind prison bars; for plays in which the players

MUST WE BE SO PRECIOUS?

have to rush on to the stage from the auditorium,—usually falling foul of feet in the gangway; for plays which require us painstakingly to learn the Internationale. There are no tears in their plays and very little laughter. They are propagandists; the stage is their soap-box and the audience their crowd to be converted to one 'ism' or another.

The blank-verse coterie includes our two poets (unsuccessful) and a divorcée, newly acquired this season. She has short curly hair and wears sack-like garments drawn in at the waist with a gold cord. There are differences of opinion as to whether or no she can be considered an asset to us. On the one hand 'we don't want the society to get known for that sort of thing'; on the other, we must be broadminded. To consent to breathe the same air as the divorced is still for us broad-mindedness. Their world is not our world.

The exponents of blank-verse drama seem anxious, above all things, to obscure the fact that their plays are written in verse. This produces a curiously mixed effect as of rather pedantic English flavoured with a dash of literal translation from the German with adjectives and nouns occurring in unexpected places.

There are not many of the cold-Northern-drama enthusiasts, but during the season they usually succeed in putting on one or two plays of unrelieved gloom. These are considered by the Communists to be very 'vieux jeu,' if not definitely reactionary. It will be fairly safe to assume, before the curtain goes up on the first act, that, before it drops after the third, someone on the stage will die of a cough, or that nine out of the ten characters will be heavily oppressed by a sense of their own futility, the tenth being a happy imbecile of some eighty-seven summers; or that an orchard will (or will not) have been cut down to make way for corporation houses.

Are there no real people in the Little Theatre? Twenty or thirty of them, perhaps, out of a membership list of a hundred and fifty; twenty or thirty for whom the theatre is half of life; who come to every rehearsal, whether playing or not,—shadowy figures in the back row of the dusty and dust-sheeted auditorium. Their interest in drama, unlike the professional's, must always be a conscious one. The very alphabet of the stage,—'act-drops' and 'ambers,' 'battens' and 'blues,' 'flops' and 'props,'—is consciously employed,

not with affectation but from the genuine desire that they have to live the life of the theatre world and to taste something of its flavour. These are the people who steal into the empty dressing-rooms between the shows, happy to see again the medley of grease-paints, dust, powder, spirit-gum, old hats and discarded beards. They even refuse to be bored by dress-rehearsals that begin at five and continue till eleven o'clock, to the running accompaniment of cross-talk between the stage-manager on the floor and the lighting man somewhere up in the flies; "Take out your first batten ambers and put in two blues,—that's right,—dim them a bit,—not quite so much. Now, Mr. Stanley, just give that Fascist salute again, will you, and see if your arm touches the syk-border? I thought so. Carstairs, raise that second sky-border a foot, will you? That'll do..."

Is it worth it? Worth running a theatre for thirty real people and a hundred and twenty poseurs? How many founders and secretaries and treasurers of how many little theatres must ask themselves that question? Half an hour's diligent searching of the Scriptures has failed to reveal the exact whereabouts of a story, dimly remembered, concerning a wicked city which was spared annihilation on account of five (or was it ten?) just men. I had thought it would be a neat way of rounding off this article, for the answer is there; but I shall leave the intelligent reader to find it for himself.

A MINIATURE SHAKESPEARE FESTIVAL.

The London Federation of Boys' Clubs has received an increased entry for its annual Dramatics (Shakespearean) Competition this year. At least 20 Clubs will be taking part, and the Final of the competition will be decided in the theatre of the London School of Economics (by kind permission of the Director and Court of Governors) on Saturday, April 4th, at 7 p.m.

The Final of this competition always provides a most interesting evening. Any further particulars, and also tickets at very reasonable prices, can be obtained from the Secretary, London Federation of Boys' Clubs, 222, Blackfriars Road, S.E.1.

LATEST RELEASES.

"Grief Goes Over" by Merton Hodge, and "Theatre Royal" by Edna Ferber and George Kaufman, are among the new releases announced by Messrs. Samuel French. The first named play has a cast of 5 men and 6 women; and there are three changes of scene. "Theatre Royal" has a cast of 11 men and 6 women; and the action of the play takes place in one interior scene throughout.

BRITISH DRAMA LEAGUE NOTES



THE JOURNAL OF
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Neither the Editor nor the Drama League as a whole accepts any responsibility for the opinions expressed in signed articles printed in this Journal.

WE have pleasure in announcing that the series of Gramophone Records of the principal Dialects current to-day throughout the British Isles is now complete and publication will be made by the middle of April. There are twelve double-sided 12-in. records in the series, accounting for no fewer than twenty-four dialects. Four of these are Scottish, two Welsh, and two Irish, leaving sixteen for various districts in England. For the General Public the complete series will be available in a single Album, or in three smaller Albums, each containing four double-sided records. For the present, members of the League alone may purchase single records, and in due course a prospectus will be circulated throughout the entire membership. The production of the records has been a heavier task than was at first anticipated, and apologies are due to those who on various occasions have applied for some particular record and have been disappointed. We believe, however, that the quality of the series is such that the records will be acknowledged to have been worth waiting for. In some ways this is the most important enterprise yet undertaken by the League.

Yet another announcement which we are enabled to make in this number concerns the Exhibition of Modern Scenic Design which the League is organising at the Thackeray Rooms, Messrs. Derry and Toms, Kensington, to be opened to the public on Wednesday, April 15th. It is hoped to gather a representative collection of models, drawings, and costume designs illustrative of all sides of contemporary British stage work, both professional and amateur. Many of the recognised sources of such material have already been invited to submit exhibits, but there are certainly many Little Theatres which have not been approached, and to them we offer a cordial invitation to communicate with the Director of the League, indicating the nature and size of the items which they would be prepared to offer for the consideration of the selection Committee. We would ask any prospective exhibitors to write as above as early as possible, as time is short.

Besides Miss Elizabeth Bergner and other famous Continental players we welcome the presence of several distinguished producers and critics of the theatre abroad. Prof. Brann, one of whose marionette plays is illustrated in this month's "Drama" is now visiting us from Vienna, and we should be glad to introduce to him any of our readers who would be interested to assist him in arranging for a production by his famous Company. Then there is Prof. Hock who is now busy with a large scale production (in Welsh and in English) of "The Theatre of the World" at Liverpool, and Prof. Pen-Chun Chang of the University of Tientsin, who at University College, Gower Street, on Thursday, March 12th, at 5.15, will lecture on "The Tradition and Technique of the Chinese Stage." Admission will be free.

Everyone will have been distressed at the news of the recent conflagration at Citizen House, Bath, and will sympathise with the losses which Miss Consuelo de Reyes and her fellow workers have suffered. Citizen House, besides being a uniquely beautiful eighteenth century mansion, is one of the most important Community Theatre centres in England. We doubt not that the energy of Miss de Reyes will quickly achieve that reconstruction which will allow her splendid work to go on.

MORE AND MORE ONE-ACT PLAYS

Reviewed by Mary Wilde

"A Full Moon in March." By W. B. Yeats. Macmillan. 5s.

"Prize One-Act Plays." 1935. Harrap. 2s. 6d.
"One-Act Plays for Players." 2nd Series. Selected by Sydney Box. Harrap. 5s.

"The One-Act Theatre." The Seventh Book. French. 2s. 6d.

"The Deacon and the Jewess." By H. F. Rubinstein. "An Hour with Charles Dickens." By D. Wareing.

"Just Off Piccadilly." By James Parish. French. 1s.
"Death in the Dark." By Harris Deans. "The Psychologist." By Keith Briant. Frederick Muller.

1s.

"Wives and Mothers" and "I Saw a Star." By Bernard Merivale. "Joshua." By S. L. Bensusan.

"Trampled Roses." By F. E. Howard. "The Fugitive." By V. Targuse. Deane. 1s.

"Plays in Verse and Mime." By Rosalind Vallance. Nelson. 3s. 6d.

"More Merry Mimes." By Lilian I. Sayce. French. 1s.

THERE are two short plays in Mr. Yeats' book, "A Full Moon in March" and "The King of the Great Clock Tower," both variations of the same theme. A man swears to sing a queen's praise; his head is cut off and the head sings. In the first play a swine-herd is the wooer, in the second, a stroller. The plays are more nearly allied to mime than drama, for the chief interest lies in the story, the dance and song. They are written in verse and have the mystical quality characteristic of Mr. Yeats' poetry. The beauty of these plays lies in their austere setting and strangeness of idea. They need expert players to do them justice and a receptive audience.

The next volume contains three plays that were given a professional production last year. Of these "The Royal Inn," by Ronald Elwy Mitchell, was awarded the prize. The setting is sordid—a tavern near the docks. A sailor comes in and is served by a young girl. They are immediately attracted to one another. Then another girl is brought there, "in trouble," and dies upstairs. Yet in spite of that happening, the sailor and his love spend the night in the bar, without fear of the future. The motive is as old as humanity, and it is presented simply and sincerely. The charm of this play lies in the way the lovers make beauty in the midst of pain and ugliness. The second piece is "The Widow of Ephesus," by Vincent Godefroy. An underground tomb is the scene. Pausanias has been dead five days, and his young wife Anthea determines to end her life beside his body. Morbid? Yes, at this point, and almost insane. But at the coming of a Roman soldier her instinct to live is awakened. This is a strong play and exceedingly well-written. The author makes magnificent use of poetic imagery and betrays the influence of Oscar Wilde. If his diction were a little less voluptuous at times, Mr. Godefroy's work would be even better than it is. The last play in the book is based on a Gloucestershire legend that Queen Elizabeth was a man. She appears as a child of eleven playing with her governess's son of the same age. During a quarrel, the princess goes to throw a dagger out of the window, falls out and is picked up dead.

Henry the Eighth is expected, and rather than confess that Elizabeth is dead, the boy is made to impersonate her. An interesting subject, good characterisation, and carefully drawn background. The author is J. L. Clemens.

"One-Act Plays for Players" contains twelve plays, chosen for their "actability." It is a very mixed bag. "After All Those Years," by Joe Corrie, is a pitiful story of a clerk of sixty who is dismissed by his employer who wants to avoid paying a pension. To add to his troubles, he has an unsympathetic, ambitious wife. An effective play for a good all-round cast. Leonard J. Hines contributes "Dénouement" which takes us to Belgrade, where an actress past her youth saves her lover, a spy, from death. Only the worthless wretch has not the courage to escape over the frontier. The situation is unusually vivid and there is a splendid part for an actress of fine presence and quick sensibility. Next we have a prize play called "Odds All Even," by Norman Leven. The action takes place in a shelter for the homeless in the crypt of a church. Here are gathered many varied types, among them a rich man who has lost his memory. He buys wisdom from his less fortunate companions and learns from one that the secret of living is to be ready to die. A play with an idea in it.

In the same volume "Cannibal," by Helen de Zglinitzki, is concerned with the infidelities of an English Secretary of the French Embassy and his wife, with farcical and irrelevant fuss about an operation on a cat called Cannibal. It does not amount to much. The rivalries and love affairs of stage folk are the material of "Command Performance," by Joan Hawkins and Paul Dore Lee. The action bears only an oblique relation to the title. In "Fair Rosamund" Lal Norris tells the familiar story of the vengeance Queen Eleanor took on Henry the Second's mistress, and how the king is the unconscious instrument of her death. The scene between Henry and Rosamund is full of charm; indeed, this is a play that can be recommended. Not so "Object all Sublime," by Frederick Ferris, which has an improbable plot ending with a legal conundrum. Brevity is its chief virtue. "The Gaol Bird," by John Brokenshire, is a domestic comedy that won a prize at the Blackpool Festival, though why I can't imagine. Next a historical piece, "Diana the Hunted," by Hugh Douglas Barr, date about 1530; setting the French Court. It has two scenes, and is by those two scenes too long. In "The Brown Paper Parcel" Elizabeth Barrett loses her dog Flush and Robert Browning recovers it from the dog-stealer. A veiled proposal ends this somewhat sloppy episode, written by V. Hedley Quant. It is a relief to come upon "Mr. Hackett's Prize," a first-class comedy of low life, by H. V. Purcell, involving excellent business with a vacuum cleaner. Last, we have "In a Glass Darkly," by Muriel Box, where an artist paints the portrait of a lovely lady, falls in love with her, and never discovers she is blind. Well, well!

"The One-Act Theatre" embodies seven plays, of which "Bamboo," by Leonard Hines and Frank King is the most arresting. The scene is China, and the plot shows how Meng Fu and Meng Poh seek death because their son has stolen the master's money in their keeping. The theme is deeply moving, the climax satisfying

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and the style distinguished. Lighting effects are important, so is the use of the wind, which moans "bamboo" at the beginning and end. To Western ears the word has a comic sound not at all suggestive of the winds of God. The producer must take care. After two readings of Harold Brighouse's "New Leisure" I am at a loss to discover the upshot of this play, though each of the characters is well-defined. "Elizabeth and Mary," by T. C. Fowle, conjures up a meeting between the two queens, in which there is much feline recrimination and little dramatic effect. There is another play "The Way to London" by R. E. Mitchell about a mining district in South Wales. It tells how a girl decides to escape her environment and become a servant in London; good of its kind. A Shavian situation is created by George W. Porter in "Capital Punishment," where an impecunious king of a tiny state pardons a murderer because it costs too much to execute him. Short and amusing. George Hines is responsible for an unconvincing play about the Silver Jubilee, "Their Majesties Pass By." Last in the book comes "Ask a Policeman," by Frank Whitbourn, a burlesque for puppets, or human actors impersonating puppets.

The piquant title of Mr. Rubinstein's play, "The Deacon and the Jewess," explains the motive. The period is the thirteenth century, and the action describes a raid by Oxford students on the Jewish colony. The picture of the Jewish interior is extremely well drawn, so also are the characters. For a curtain there is a reading from the scriptures, always more impressive on the stage than in a place of worship. A very good play.

"An Hour with Charles Dickens" contains four well-chosen and amusing sketches, the best of which is from "Nicholas Nickleby." To a generation that does not read Dickens these may prove a pleasing novelty. Now for a ghost play called "Just Off Piccadilly," where a woman interested in psychic research comes to an empty room that is haunted. A man enters, very real to judge by his talk, but in fact the ghost of her former lover. He asks forgiveness, but she denies it, and his soul is doomed to eternal loneliness. This play arouses expectation and holds the attention from start to finish. The eternal triangle is the plot of "Death in the Dark." A middle-aged husband, his young wife, and her lover are the chief characters. The husband murders the wife and makes it appear that the lover is her murderer. Clever dialogue leads to a swift climax. Neat workmanship throughout. "The Psychologist" is another tragedy. Two brothers are staying at a lonely inn on the mountains when the younger and unsuccessful one is tempted to kill the elder and inherit his money. The elder brother becomes aware of this and shoots himself. Then the younger one follows his example. The curtain falls on two corpses symmetrically posed at either end of the table. A painful drama that discloses the latent evil in human nature, but excellent theatre.

Here are two plays by Bernard Merivale. "Wives and Mothers" is a cynical commentary on women and an embroidery on the theme of egoism. The dialogue is pointed and economical and altogether this piece can be recommended. "I Saw a Star" has nothing to do with astronomy, but concerns a famous film star who acts the boor to a film-struck village beauty and so sends her back to the decent fellow who loves her; good entertainment. Mr. Bensusan has a gift for

drawing village life. "Joshua," written in Essex dialect, shows how a cunning old shepherd gets the better of a poacher. There are five characters, all excellent creations, and full of native wit. Now for a comedy in Yorkshire dialect—"Trampled Roses." This is well above the average in humour and situation.

Shall we ever get a servant on the stage who is true to type? The opening of "The Fugitive" is spoilt by the drivelling conversation of the maid. Otherwise the play is interesting. A female prisoner escapes and finds refuge in the house of a spinster whose life is easy and pleasant. She is moved by the prisoner's story to help her to evade the detectives. Most women will like this.

To those who cultivate the art of miming, Miss Rosalind Vallance's book will be welcome. It includes the stories of Persephone, Echo and Narcissus, and Pandora's Box from the Greek myths, "The Fairies of Caldron Low," based on Mary Howitt's ballad, and "Rapunzel" from Grimm's Fairy Tales—a varied collection. All of these are in verse. There are full acting notes, suggestions for appropriate music and advice about staging. Graceful motion and the ability to speak verse well are the important things which Miss Vallance cannot ensure for the actors, but she gives them lovely lines and movements, full of poetry and imagination.

Miss Sayce's little book of mimes is a very jolly affair. There are three pieces, all short. The first is a ballad about winter, the second "Charles Augustus Fortescue," and the last "Widdicombe Fair" (for an all-men cast). Directions for staging, production and costume are added. With such material, success should not be difficult.

HISTORICAL PLAYS.

"Paradise Regained." By Beatrice Saxon Snell.
 "Plus ça Change." By Evan John. French. 1s.
 "Maid's Judgment." By Margaret Ashworth. Deane. 1s.
 "Wharfedale Witches." By Ina Kitson Clark. Richard Jackson, 5 Albion Place, Leeds. 9d.

The first on the list is a carefully constructed picture of Milton in his later years, blind and pestered by his womenfolk. The only occurrence is a visit from Thomas Ellwood. An instructive piece, no doubt, but verbose. In "Plus ça Change" we have a flippant treatment of the French Revolution. There are a large number of characters in period costumes, which could be caricatured quite cheaply. It is a curious subject to treat in jocular vein, though it is cleverly done and in a small space much history is condensed. Good acting and a quick tempo are imperative. Monmouth's rebellion is the subject of "Maid's Judgment." Judge Jeffreys is busy in the West, and comes to the house of his kinswoman Julia, who holds a letter that would hang the neighbour who slighted her. It rests with Julia to decide his fate. There are no dull moments in this play. Suspense grows to a crescendo till the curtain falls. A well-constructed, effective drama. "Wharfedale Witches" has three scenes, and the time covers fourteen months, to allow witchcraft to do its work. A magic penny with a hole in it comes into the possession of the Fairfax family, and until they restore it to the witch, she pursues them with vengeance. Their baby dies and their daughter is vexed by a devil,

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which in the end is exorcised by the said penny. The play is founded on a book on Demonology by Edward Fairfax, 1622; the subject though interesting in itself, might not appeal to every audience.

PLAYS FOR WOMEN.

"The Wise Woman." By S. L. Bensusan. Deane. 1s.
 "Seven for Sylvia." By Lydia Havers. Muller. 1s.
 "A Matter of Fact." By Lillian I. Sayce. "A Dust-up at Madam's." By Ida F. Parfitt. Joseph Williams. 1s.

It is a rare pleasure to come across a really good play for an all-women cast, but here is one. Mr. Bensusan again chooses the Essex dialect and makes the chief character a "wise woman," that is a kind of witch doctor. Patients come to her with various complaints which she treats with draughts of herbs of her own compounding, after consulting the planets. Her diagnoses are the funniest things I have met for years. But when she herself is hurt, she calls in the doctor against whom she has warned her patients. This play deserves the highest praise. "Seven for Sylvia" describes how a film star goes to stay with her maiden aunts, brings them up to date and gets two of them married. A simple comedy for the unsophisticated. We have a good example of village drama in "A Matter of Fact." The types are easily recognisable, especially the domineering woman who "runs" everybody. Humour is provided by the introduction of an image of Buddha. Whoever holds it is bound to speak the truth. Whereupon certain characters are unmasked, which of course is always entertaining. The tricks of the millinery business form the plot of "A Dust-up at Madam's." There is nothing subtle about it, but as hats are of interest to most properly-constituted women, this amusing little sketch should appeal to them.

Other Plays Received:

"He That Hops." By R. E. Mitchell. French. 1s. A charming fairy play for children.
 "The Power of the Press." By Walter McLeod. Beverley Press, Dartford. 1s. Satire on a newspaper magnate.
 "Supper for Two." By Edgar Wilford. Gowans and Gray. 1s. A time-worn subject.
 "A Charm for the Devil." By E. U. Oules. Deane 1s. In verse. A wandering scholar outwits a friar. The author gives another one of her excellent translations from Hans Sachs.

SCOTTISH PLAYS.

"The Income." "Red Roses." "Martha." By Joe Corrie. "Cupboard Love." By C. Stewart Black. Brown, Son and Ferguson. 1s.
 "The Quality of Mercy." By Felix Fair. French. 1s.

Mr. Joe Corrie's plays are easily the best of the Scottish ones we have under review. A surgery in a mining town is the scene of "The Income," (which for English readers must be translated as an ingrowing toe-nail). Patients gather and talk about their ailments and frighten one another into imaginary complaints. Humorous dialogue and clear characterization make for success. In "Red Roses" a prosperous builder advertises for a wife in the "Matrimonial Budget," anonymously. His own housekeeper and another woman who is his pet aversion answer the advertise-

ment. There are amusing complications about wearing a red rose, and in the end the housekeeper is snaffled by his friend. A grand comedy. "Martha" is in a different mood. A mother who has lost three sons in the War deludes herself that the last surviving one is coming home for good. Unhappily, her friends receive news that he has just been killed. All is ready for his welcome, and Martha falls asleep waiting, and dies. This play is unbearably sad to read, its pathos is so deep, and I am not surprised that it won first place in the Scottish Community Drama Festival last year, and later appeared at the London Final.

"Cupboard Love" is a good example of kitchen comedy. It is about a middle-aged servant on a farm who wants to marry her employer. A young friend teaches her the use of cosmetics to work the trick, but it fails. Only when the servant gives notice does the farmer realise what a good cook she is, and proposes in order to keep her. "The Quality of Mercy" is a Scots version of "It's the Poor that 'elps the Poor," by Harold Chapin. There are thirteen characters, street-vendors. They are just back from the funeral of Mrs. Murray's baby who has died while the father has been serving a short term in prison. The scene in the bed-sitting room is richly comic at first, but the stormy outburst of the father who unexpectedly comes back changes the atmosphere completely. As usual, Mr. Chapin shows real understanding of the poor, their humour and resentments.

Other Plays Received:

"The Wee Motto." By Margaret M. Muir.
 "Humour or Ruse." By Cormac Simpson. "Fire Policy" and "Mrs. Watson at Bay." By Hal. D. Stewart. "Many Happy Returns." By W. D. Cocker. "Easy-oasy." By Janet Laing and Paterson Whyte. "Let go the Painter." By D. Gordon Wright Brown, Son and Ferguson. 1s.

LONDON EASTER SCHOOL.

Miss Peggy Ashcroft will open the London Easter Drama School on Wednesday, April 15th. The programme this year, will be on rather different lines from previous years. A different play will be rehearsed every three days by three different producers; Dr. Stephan Hock, Mr. John Fernald, and Mr. Martin Browne. The League is fortunate in having secured the services of so distinguished a figure in the International Theatres as Dr. Hock, who is in England for his production of "The Great World Theatre" at Liverpool. Dr. Hock has worked in association with Professor Reinhardt, and his productions are well known on the Continent and in America. There are to be four evening sessions during the School. At the first of these (Sunday, April 18th), Mr. Sladen-Smith will speak on "Play-writing," and Mr. Fernald will rehearse "Dear Brutus" at the other three. It is hoped that Londoners who are working during the day will avail themselves of these sessions. Another new feature of the School will be the classes in Period Movement and Costume Design by Miss Valerie Prentiss and Miss Enid Barr. Some Drama League members will remember their fascinating demonstration at Welwyn last year. Prospectuses of the School may now be had from the League.

AN EXPERIMENT IN PLAY-MAKING

By Elizabeth Cross

NEARLY all children have a natural love of dramatic expression which often finds an outlet in the many "dressing-up" games that are found in the average nursery. Again, the majority of schools go in for some kind of End of Term Entertainment, which often includes a short play. The following account of some plays written, acted and more or less produced by a group of boys and girls from 7 to 12 may be of interest.

These particular children (at a Co-Educational Boarding School), showed a good deal of interest in spontaneous dramatic work in connection with the English and History lessons, and it was decided to produce a short play. The difficulty arose in finding a play simple enough for their capacities and yet in no way babyish as they were all extremely intelligent and came from homes that had engendered a certain sophistication.

After much discussion it was decided that the group should write the play. This was done, and proved such a success that a whole group of plays, spread out over a period of about five years, resulted. These plays varied greatly in content and finish, according to the age of the group responsible and also varied through the different children that contributed to them. They were all marked, however, by a direct and economical dramatic vigour, and a very real sense of "theatre."

The way they were made is as follows. A group decided to make a play. They held a preliminary meeting in which the main subject was chosen, a subject that had plenty of active possibilities, was suitable for striking costume, simple scenery, etc. Then the actors wrangled for parts. On the whole everyone was soon satisfied, because as the parts were mere names and indications, such as villain, wicked fisherman, village idiot, and so on, there was always the possibility of making your part into what you wanted (being given proper names later).

The actual writing of the play was done by the group sitting round and dictating to a member of the staff, each character more or less composed his own words, criticised freely by the whole group, and if he got stuck the others helped him out. As a general rule four or five children composed the greater part of

each play, but all contributed a certain amount. The rate of progress varied enormously. Sometimes a whole scene would get done in an hour, other times we were stuck for ages. As each scene was finished it was read through, heartily criticised by all, and often completely altered, in disgust. When the play was completed parts were written out, learned by heart and rehearsals began.

The learning by heart was very thorough in order to allow for spontaneous acting from the very beginning. This is very important with children. Let them get well soaked in the part, think about it, decide just exactly what sort of person it is and they will go head first into real dramatic expression. Adult advice was given very sparingly, in fact the adult merely kept a certain amount of order among those waiting for their cues, and gave sympathetic encouragement where needed.

The position of scenery (represented at first by flower pots, chairs, etc.), was decided upon at the first rehearsal, as was all very definite action, exits, etc., although details grew in later. A stage manager (one of the children), made rough sketches of the position of scenery, groups of characters, etc., and saw that these were accurately repeated at each performance. It is only by constant short, repetitive rehearsals that children can manage a play without having to worry about remembering things. Rehearsals were never allowed to go on long, they were definitely a pleasure, as were the final performances.

Besides the value from the point of view of speech training, movement, and so on, a great deal of preliminary study was done on the subjects for each play; such as the ancient Egyptians, in which appeared a great many authentic Gods, with costumes, inspired by prints from the British Museum. Again, the costumes were considered as a part of the whole, as was the scenery, however simple.

By working out their own ideas the children soon began to find out what made a play interesting, and had plenty of scope for ingenuity in disposing of characters that would otherwise clutter up the stage, or in giving somebody something plausible to do in the background. Of course the mortality rate in the earliest plays was extremely high,



GOETHE ON TRIAL. SCENE FROM
A PUPPET PLAY PRODUCED BY PROF.
PAUL BRANN. THE PUPPETS MADE
BY OLAF GULBRANSSON.



THE HEATH SCENE FROM "MACBETH"
AS PRODUCED BY MR. ANGUS WILSON
FOR THE EPSOM COUNTY SCHOOL FOR
BOYS. (See Note, page 107.)

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AN EXPERIMENT IN PLAY-MAKING

all the characters died of famine, plague or murder, it seeming the only logical way to make the play end! But later plays grew less deadly, although funerals were always more popular than weddings.

The speeches were all extremely short. This was and is a real necessity for children's plays, in order that they may give them with spontaneity and conviction; such as this from a play about an imaginary country:

Innkeeper: "I'll explain: a revolution's what we ought to have . . . it's great fun. You have a procession and a rusty knife tied to a bit of string and it chops the king's head off and it is called a Jelatine."

And this one from a rather ambitious play concerning a youth deciding on his profession. He is discussing wives with a farmer, and asks if he finds his wife satisfactory;

Farmer: "Why whatever do you mean? She's a good cook, and a wonderful manager, and an excellent mother,—what more can you want?"

Youth: "Plenty. I should want someone to talk to in the evenings, and play chess with me, and understand my ways and my thoughts. And I'd try to do the same for her."

Farmer: "How peculiar! I wouldn't want a wife who was always thinking and talking,—women shouldn't think,—it puts ideas into their heads."

While for sheer economy of dialogue this, by the five-six-year olds is hard to beat;

Scene I. *Dining room of the King's palace. King, Queen, and Prince having tea with salad.*

Prince: "I hate tin bowls."

King: "You can have the best bowl in the palace for your salad because it is your birthday."

Prince: "Thank you."

Queen: "Please don't let him have it, he may bust it."

King: "Please let him, it's his birthday." Etc., Etc.

A final warning, we learnt to cut out meals in plays. The actors always ate so much and so thoroughly that everything else was completely forgotten until all the food had gone, and imitation food was *not* approved of.

SOME PROBLEMS OF STAGE COSTUME

By C. M. Bowen.

DIFFICULTIES about costume arise most frequently in connection with Shakespearean productions. Here the question is complicated by the fact that most of Shakespeare's plays do not, ostensibly, deal with his own time; the producer has therefore to decide between Elizabethan costume and the costume proper to the period in which the action of the play passes. If he makes the latter choice, he is hampered by Shakespeare's deficiencies in historical knowledge; there are, for example, passages in the plays which show beyond a doubt that he imagined Cleopatra in a laced corsage, Brutus in a doublet and hose. In some plays the discrepancies are not confined to single lines, but affect the whole background; thus in "King Lear" we are asked to imagine ourselves in a pre-Christian Britain which has many of the characteristics of the feudal period.

It is clear that Shakespeare envisaged his characters as dressed in Elizabethan costume, whatever the period of the play, and if Elizabethan dress were adopted in modern productions we should get rid of such incongruities as these. Some producers, however, have gone further, and argue that, since Shakespeare had his actors dressed in the dress of their own time, therefore actors of any period should wear contemporary dress. This was, of course, the usual practice until the latter part of the eighteenth century, but it had long been discontinued when Sir Barry Jackson some years ago caused much discussion by his modern-dress productions of several of the plays.

It is a controversial question, but one advantage at least may be claimed for modern dress; it undoubtedly brings out distinctions between different types of dress which pass unnoticed when all the characters are in "costume." In Sir Barry Jackson's "Hamlet" the effectiveness of the play-scene owed a good deal to the contrast between the traditional costume of the players and the modern dress of the characters who composed the audience.

SOME PROBLEMS OF STAGE COSTUME

The chief difficulty in modern dress productions arises when ideas are expressed, or social conditions suggested, which seem incongruous in the twentieth century. Thus, in "Macbeth," the sight of characters dressed in the khaki uniform worn by British officers in the Great War made it quite impossible to believe oneself in a period when England was making war on Scotland. A rather different kind of problem for the producer arises when obsolete articles of dress or equipment are not merely referred to, but actually used. A modern Hamlet might engage in a fencing match with Laertes, but he would not be carrying a sword in the earlier scene in which he kills Polonius. Sir Barry Jackson solved this problem very ingeniously by making Hamlet snatch a sword from an ornamental suit of armour standing in the hall, but there are many plays in which no such resource would be available.

These difficulties seldom occur in revivals of the seventeenth and eighteenth century "classics," because most of them deal with the life of their own time; but in plays written within the last fifty years the question again arises. Are the characters to wear the clothes of the present day or those of the eighteenth or nineteenth centuries? This is a matter of serious importance to the poorer amateur societies, which can spend little on costumes and naturally prefer plays in which the actors can wear their ordinary clothes. Yet even in as recent a play as Mr. Shaw's "Getting Married" occasional anachronisms strike one if it is played in modern dress; for instance, Lesbia's references to smoking sound strange from the lips of a modern woman apparently on the right side of forty.

Even if the play is dressed according to its period, however, all is not plain sailing. When Ibsen's "Pillars of Society" was revived at the Everyman Theatre in 1926 the characters wore the dress of the eighteen-seventies. Lona Hessel, who is represented in the play as being so eccentric in her dress that people followed her in the street, wore a loosely-fitting grey dress and cloak which were not only more becoming, but, to the 1926 audience, less ridiculous than the tight bodices, voluminous skirts and "bustles" of the other women.

So far it has been assumed that realism and historical accuracy are what the costume

designer is aiming at. This was true from the end of the eighteenth century to the beginning of the twentieth; in recent years, however, there has been a tendency to aim at more conventional effects, only vaguely suggesting a particular period. This is useful in fantastic plays, and those in which the period is not clearly defined; for instance, in "The Tempest" or "Cymbeline." There is danger, however, lest these fanciful costumes should suggest—whether by accident or design—a period quite unsuitable to the play. There was not long ago a production of "The Merchant of Venice" at the Old Vic in which Portia and Nerissa wore what can only be described as crinolines.

A skilful producer can often use costumes to obtain various symbolical and imaginative effects. In Mr. John Gielgud's recent production of "Hamlet" there was a colour scheme of gold and brown and black which was used for the setting of the court scenes and the dress of the courtiers as well as those of the King and Queen, Hamlet himself being in the traditional black. This helped to emphasise the sycophancy of the court and the detachment of Hamlet from it. Similarly, the symmetrical structure and grouping of the characters in "Love's Labour's Lost" was brought out in its production at the Westminster Theatre when the King and his gentlemen were dressed in one colour and the Princess and her ladies in another. In Sir Nigel Playfair's production of "The Importance of being Earnest" all the costumes and settings were carried out in black, white and grey; the artificiality of this was entirely suitable to the artificiality of the play itself.

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

SIR,

I was interested to read Mr. Fuller's letter regarding The Actor Producer, and more particularly because I thoroughly endorse his view that the producer should not act in any play he produces. I am quite certain in my own mind that only in very exceptional circumstances can this method lead to anything but failure. But I feel that Mr. Fuller ought to bear in mind one important fact; the amateur producer very often acts in his own production because he has not enough actors to complete the cast. I have been in this position myself on several occasions.

Yours truly,

G. E. MIDDLEDITCH.

NEWS FROM NORTH AND SOUTH

SASKATCHEWAN.

The Saskatchewan Drama League was formed during the first Provincial Festival sponsored by Lord Bessborough, along with the sister provinces, nearly three years ago. It was launched on a wave of enthusiasm and determination to guide the many amateur groups expending enormous energy and time on non-royalty American slap-stick into channels of better and British drama. The members of the executive have practically financed the movement to date and the results are most gratifying. The movement is spreading like a prairie fire and threatens to run away from us owing to lack of funds and lending facilities. The first year ended with one festival (without preliminaries) being held just after seeding in a temperature of 94°; competitors motored day and night to arrive for rehearsals commencing at 6 a.m. This was the first time many competitors and members of the audience had seen good drama and a team motoring 275 miles took the cup with the presentation of "Campbell of Kihlmoor." The second year three zones were formed with district secretaries and festivals and the final showed a large increase in entries and 100% improvement in choice of plays and quality of work. The festivals, from which we must draw our revenue, have just broken even as yet. The League has appealed several times to our government for help, but it is too harassed with the financial stringency attending five years drought to respond financially. The League now faces, what it considers a critical year because the set-up of the machinery swallows the small rural fees and the League has nothing yet to offer the city clubs if they join by way of lending plays and books. We have started the nucleus of a lending library but our immediate need is for technical books, which need to be in duplicate on account of the size of the Province, and a selection of plays for the League to recommend.

B. DAISY EDWARDS,
Vice-Pres., Sask. Drama League

CAMBRIDGE.

The Rodney Dramatic Club have moved into magnificent new quarters in St. Andrew's Street which is right in the centre of the town. There is a Green Room and a Theatre the latter having formerly been the University Council Chamber. A special lighting plant has been installed. These quarters were formally opened by the Mayoress of Cambridge (Mrs. H. T. Wing) who was accompanied by the Mayor. Readings of plays are held regularly and at Christmas an original Revue was so popular that it had to be repeated. Three teams were entered for the local competition arranged by the British Drama League and the Club had the exceptional success of gaining first three places. L. du Garde Peach's "The Path of Glory" is being presented at the new "Arts Theatre" on March 19, 20, 21. An invitation to again compete in the Welwyn Garden City Festival in May has been accepted.

BRITISH COLUMBIA.

The British Columbia Drama Festival Association Inc. has recently conducted its fourth annual Provincial Festival. This, like the three previous festivals, was a great success. The Adjudicator was Lady Tupper of

Winnipeg, Manitoba, who gave helpful suggestions to the various competitors. The Festival lasted a full week with Saturday night reserved for the finals.

An encouraging and most gratifying feature of this year's festival was the number of plays written by local authors. Both first and second places were won with such plays.

The membership of the Association is growing very rapidly. It also has sixty-five affiliated groups throughout the province which may at any time avail themselves of information at its disposal. Neither affiliated groups, members or competing groups are charged any fees. One of the most striking features of the policy of this drama Association, is its non-commercial attitude. The public can obtain transferable season tickets which admit to about thirty plays for the price of One Dollar.

The Association hopes to form a library of plays which will be available to affiliated groups. It also hopes to arrange preliminary festivals in the smaller communities where absence of transportation facilities makes a visit to Victoria a matter of difficulty. It is most important that some means of self-expression should be given to these outlying settlements since they are off the beaten track of touring entertainment. Dramatic work embraces so many of the allied arts that it is the ideal form of diversion for the scattered communities of British Columbia.

H. R. GOLDFINCH,
Hon. Secretary.

EPSOM COUNTY SCHOOL.

A comparatively unusual feature about the recent "Macbeth" production by Mr. Angus Wilson for the Epsom County School for Boys, was that the Weird Sisters did not move from the positions shown in the photograph (see page 105). No dancing, no ridiculous gyrating round a pot—only an occasional gesture with a black-gloved hand or a raising of the head in demoniacal laughter.

The masks were Fifth of November disguises costing sixpence each, the original design being blacked out and repulsive features painted on with green and brown poster colour outlined in gold. The hair was mop-yarn got straight from the factory through an ironmonger and dyed green. The boys wore dark jerseys shorts and stockings, draped over with black theatrical gauze cut and torn along the edges to give vagueness of outline.

The white triangle below the two Sisters on the left is the cauldron—merely the corner between the ramp and the steps cut off by a board and lit by an orange bulb concealed below. Two focus-lamps in green and amber, very dim, shone on the Sisters, while Macbeth was silhouetted against a backcloth lit in green and magenta. The tree and the two back wings were in keeping with the other scenes, in which not a single curve appeared.

The apparition was cut out of a piece of cardboard, and the latter was held in front of a 6-amp. focussed arc high up in the prompt flies, stage right. This and the other visions were worked by an operator standing on a tall ladder.

NEWS FROM NORTH AND SOUTH

SWAKELEY'S HOUSE.

On Wednesday, February 19th, in the hall of Swakeley's House, Ickenham, an interesting invitation performance took place when Mr. E. Stuart Monro presented Act 4, Scene 7, from "King Lear," and Oscar Wilde's "A Florentine Tragedy." "Swakeleys" is a beautiful Jacobean mansion now used as the Headquarters of the Foreign Office Sports Association, by whose kind permission the present performance was given. The main hall of the house, which contains a very beautifully carved Renaissance screen, stretching right across the hall, provided a perfect scene for both plays. From the large open fireplace came flickers of flame, most appropriate to the plays, and the audience was wafted back in spirit to that time when drama was so often the natural entertainment given by some great noble in his own house to his assembled guests.

In "A Florentine Tragedy" Mr. David Hitchin gave a fine performance of Simone, the Silk Merchant, while Miss Ann Twigg and Mr. Cyril Stanway were both impressive as Bianca and Guido.

THE CURTAIN THEATRE, ROCHDALE.

"THE DOCTOR'S DILEMMA" by G. B. SHAW.

A kind of stock in trade manner has grown up in the professional theatre for the playing of Shaw; with some actors specialising in Shavian parts as others have in Shakespearean, and with the same deadening results. Since anything in the nature of a live dramatic performance demands more than a manner of speaking blank verse or wisecracks, it is pleasant to find a theatre which approaches Shaw (and possibly Shakespeare) as freshly as any other contemporary dramatist.

Such is the attitude of the Curtain Theatre, Rochdale, towards "The Doctor's Dilemma," which was recently produced there by Mr. Gerald Fay. The play has certainly not dated, nor will it ever date so long as there are fashionable doctors and artistic temperaments. The performance was delightfully smooth and delicate, with every line given point, but never spoken as a series of epigrams instead of dramatic dialogue. The cast was so excellent that no one person could be singled out for special praise.

The next production of the Curtain Theatre will be Clemence Dane's "Wild Decembers."

MARIE SETON.

HAZELL'S PLAYERS PRODUCTION.

"WHEN KNIGHTS WERE BOLD."

JANUARY 30TH—FEBRUARY 1ST, 1936.

There was an outstanding occasion of amateur acting in Buckinghamshire when the Dramatic Club of the Aylesbury Branch of Hazell Watson & Viney Ltd., gave three performances of "When Knights were Bold." Sir Guy de Vere was played by Mr. Peter Hazell with good judgment, considerable effect, and with obvious enjoyment. The tiresome part of Rowena was made really attractive by Miss Rene Phipps, mainly by means of her pleasing voice, and a quiet personality which she knows how to 'put across.' But it was not so much individual performance which made this production good; it was the atmosphere of confidence, a large cast well rehearsed, well-dressed and all in a most effective setting.

The Firm of Hazell Watson & Viney Ltd. has recently provided their Aylesbury Employees with new Club buildings, in which there is a hall to seat 500 people. The large stage is fitted in the most up-to-date manner, with a cyclorama, and a four-colour system of lighting. The Dream-scene brought up behind gauze in silhouette against the cyclorama was the most effective method I have ever seen for this play, and the simple curtain setting of blue for the interiors and light grey for the second act exterior were completely successful, and lent extra emphasis to the bright colouring of the medieval costumes.

This was the first play to be performed in this Hall and it could not have been better received. This Dramatic Club has talent, a fine stage and a most promising future.

TRECYNON LITTLE THEATRE.

PLAY-WRITING COMPETITION FOR THE
"ALISTAIR WILSON" CUP.

- A. 1. The Competition has been instituted to encourage new writers is open to England and Wales.
2. The play submitted may be in either English or Welsh.
3. The prize will be awarded if the adjudicators deem the best effort worthy.
5. The "Alistair Wilson" Cup shall not be won outright.
5. The play submitted must
 - (a) be a new work which has not previously been presented on any stage.
 - (b) not be a translation.
 - (c) take a minimum of two hours to stage.
 - (d) be type-written.
 - (e) bear the competitor's nom-de-plume.
 - (f) be in the hands of the Hon. Sec., Mr. Tom Davies, Llety Caradog, Treccynon, Aberdare, by June 1st., 1936.
6. The competitor's name and address (in a sealed envelope on the outside of which must be written the competitor's nom-de-plume) shall accompany the entry.

B. The Award.

1. The winner shall hold the "Alistair Wilson" Cup for one year.
2. The Executive Committee of the Little Theatre will present the author with five hundred printed copies of the play.
3. The play will be given a five nights' run at the Little Theatre during season 1936-7.
4. The Playing Rights will be handed over to the author immediately after the Little Theatre performances.

Note. Should the second play in order of merit be considered worthy of production the Executive Committee may decide to do so.

Remember the date of the Community Theatre Festival Final—Monday evening, May 25, at the Old Vic.

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